

# ECCLESIASTES.

## INTRODUCTION.

I. THIS Book is placed, in the most ancient Jewish and Christian lists, between the other two Books (Proverbs and the Song of Songs) attributed to Solomon, and the constant tradition of the Jewish and Christian Churches has handed down Solomon without question as the author.

Some modern critics have indeed alleged that Solomon could not have written it, (*a*) because the language is such as no Jew in his age could have used, (*b*) because the language differs from that of Proverbs and the Song of Songs, and (*c*) because the historical allusions in the Book do not agree with the period and the circumstances of Solomon.

(*a*) In answer to this, it would appear that every word quoted from Ecclesiastes as impossible to be used before the Captivity has been shewn either (1) to be used in Books written, as is generally believed, before the Captivity; or (2) to be formed from words, and by a grammatical process, in use before the Captivity; or (3) to be represented in such Books by a derivative; or (4) to be undoubtedly common to other Semitic dialects besides Chaldee, and therefore, presumably, to Hebrew before the Captivity, although not found in extant writings of earlier date than Ecclesiastes. The allegation, therefore, that the language of this Book shews distinct traces of the Chaldean invasion, of the Babylonian Captivity, or of any later event which

affected the Hebrew tongue, may be considered sufficiently answered.<sup>1</sup>

(*b*) The dissimilarity in style and diction between this Book and Proverbs or the Song of Songs is admitted; but it has been accounted for to some extent, first, by the difference of subject. Abstract ideas may be expressed up to a certain point by words which originally denoted something else: but philosophic thought such as distinguishes this Book from the other two, gradually forms its own terminology. Next, it is argued, that there was an interval of many years between the composition of the two former Books and of this; and that in that time there was a natural change in the temperament, views, and style of the writer; a change which may be traced partly to Solomon's familiarity with foreign women sprung from various Semitic races, partly also to his extensive negotiations and personal intercourse with the representatives of other nations, some of whom were

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<sup>1</sup> Writers who maintain that the language of Ecclesiastes could not have been used by a Jew in Solomon's age, diverge so widely from one another on the question of date as to suggest a serious doubt whether such grammatical knowledge of Hebrew as is now attainable ought to be allowed all the weight that is claimed for it in deciding the date of the composition of this Book. If the majority place it between the 4th and 6th centuries B.C., some place it as high as the 10th and some as low as the 1st.

not of Semitic origin (1 K. x. 22).<sup>2</sup> Lastly, to balance the differences, it is to be noted that there are some characteristic resemblances between these Books. It is reasonable to regard these as an indication of a common origin.

(c) It is alleged that the particular mention of Jerusalem (i. 1, 12) as the seat of Solomon's reign, implies that the Book was written at a time when there was more than one seat of kingly authority in Israel, *i.e.* after the separation of the ten tribes and the erection of another capital, Samaria. The answer is that there is an obvious fitness in the specific mention of Jerusalem previous to the account of Solomon's labours in chs. i, ii, for it was the scene of his peculiar work for many years, and the place which he had made the chief monument of his grandeur.

It is alleged that the expression, "I was king" (i. 12), implies that at the time when these words were written Solomon was no longer king, and that consequently the passage must have been written by some one personating him after his death. But, in Hebrew the preterite is used with strict grammatical propriety in describing a past

which extends into the present. Solomon is as a speaker who views the action or state expressed by the verb as then first about coming to pass, in progress, or perhaps occurring at the instant. The phrase therefore would be both grammatically correct if used by Solomon before the close of his reign, and a natural expression of his feelings in his old age.

It is argued that such a state of violence, popular oppression and despotic rule, as that which is instanced in iv. 1 did not exist in Palestine in the peaceful reign of Solomon. This allegation has no foundation in fact. The significant statements of historians (*e.g.* 1 K. xii. 4 and 2 Chr. ii. 17, 18, viii. 7-9) and the numerous unmistakable allusions in the Book of Proverbs (*e.g.* i. 10-13, vi. 16-19, xi. 26, xiv. 20, xxii. 22, 23, xxiv. 21, xxv. 5, xxviii. 2, 16) agree with the descriptions in Ecclesiastes in shewing that the kingdom of Israel, even in its most prosperous days, afforded grievous instances of the common evils of Asiatic despotism.<sup>3</sup>

It is stated that such passages as xii. 7, 14 shew a knowledge of revealed truth beyond what was given prior to the Captivity.<sup>4</sup> But

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<sup>2</sup> The history of literature supplies many instances of the same writer expressing his thoughts in different styles. Cp. the difference between the speeches and the narrative of the Greek historian Thucydides; and cp. the difference in the dialect, diction, and metre of the chorus with the dialogue of Greek tragedy. The style of Milton in his "Ode on the Nativity," written in his 21st year, differs widely from "Samson Agonistes," a product of his old age. Holy Scripture itself supplies a striking instance of the same kind; the Revelation of St. John presents some remarkable differences of style and language if compared with the Gospel and Epistles; yet this dissimilarity

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does not prevent critics, after taking all the facts into account, from considering the whole of these Books as the work of the same author.

<sup>3</sup> It has also been argued that Solomon, as the supreme ruler of the people, and therefore responsible for the oppression, would not have placed on record a description of it. But, even supposing that Solomon's own subjects are here referred to by him; yet all sovereigns, intimately acquainted with the condition of their people, are aware of and must deplore the infliction of much misery which they are unable to prevent or to avenge.

<sup>4</sup> See Introduction to the Psalms, p. 100.

if the exact words of Ecclesiastes be compared with the obscure intimations given by Moses on the one hand, and with the later utterances of Daniel on the other, this Book appears to hold a middle place. It tallies very closely with some of the Psalms which were probably written about the age of Solomon.<sup>5</sup> After all, does not the argument above mentioned proceed on an assumption that we are more competent than we really are to find out the ways of the Author of Revelation? Are we qualified to decide positively that so much as is recorded on those subjects in Ecclesiastes came out of its proper season if it was given to Solomon?

On the whole, therefore, it seems the most reasonable course to accept as a simple statement of fact the words with which Ecclesiastes begins; and, in accordance with the voice of the Church from the beginning, to regard Solomon as the author of this Book.

II. What was the object of the writer in composing this Book?

The method of Greek philosophy and its principles, Epicurean, Stoic, and Cynic, have been attributed to the author of Ecclesiastes; but on no better ground than might be found in the writings of any thoughtful and sensitive man who has felt, contemplated, and described the perplexities of human life.

The author was evidently a man of profound faith in God, of large and varied personal experience, of acute observation of men and things, and of deep sensibility.

Probably he was first moved to write by a mind painfully full of the disappointing nature of all things viewed apart from God: next by deep sympathy with fellow-men touched by the same natural feelings as himself, and suffering like him, though each in their several ways; and thirdly, by the evident desire to lead other men, and specially young men, out of the temptations which he had felt, and out of the perplexities which once entangled and staggered him. Whether his heart was chilled by old age or by the cold shadow of some former eclipse of faith can only be conjectured; but there is in Ecclesiastes an absence of that fervour of zeal for the glory of God which glows in other Books, and which we are justified in regarding as a feature of Solomon's character in his early days. His immediate object would seem then to be to relieve his mind by pouring out the results of his own life, to comfort those who bore the same burden of humanity, and to lift up those who were naturally feeble or depressed by circumstances and to lead them in the way of God's commandments.

As regards plan, the writer of the Book evidently regarded it as complete in itself; the first part of the Book being contemplative or doctrinal, and the latter part practical.

First, there is the writer's statement of his subject, and his detailed account of his personal experience of the influence of vanity pervading human proceedings (chs. i. ii.). Then, there is the announcement of an external law to which also human affairs are subject, i.e. the will of God, Whose plan, incom-

<sup>5</sup> *c.g.* with regard to the judgment of the world, Psa. i. 5, ix. 8, xcvi. 13, and with regard to the souls of the dead being with God, Ps. xvi. 8-11.

prehensible in its extent, is found by all to be more or less in conflict with man's will (chs. iii. iv.), the result of such conflict being disappointment and perplexity to man. Then there is the commencement (ch. v.) of personal practical advice, followed by a mixture of reflections, maxims, and exhortations, in which the vanity of riches, the practical superiority of wisdom and patience, and the supreme power of God, are the prominent topics set forth in various ways (chs. vi., vii., viii.). In ch. ix. the writer's reflections, in ch. x. his maxims, are brought to an end; and in chs. xi. and xii. we have a concluding exhortation to such conduct and sentiments as are most likely to alleviate the vanity of this life, viz. to charity, industry, patience and the fear of God.

If the Book was composed, as seems probable, towards the end of Solomon's reign, its direct tendency is obvious. In an age when "silver was as stones in Jerusalem" no lesson was more necessary, and none would tell with deeper effect, than those powerful and touching declarations of the vanity of wealth and grandeur which are perhaps the most conspicuous feature in this Book. Further, if the Book appealed then, as it has ever since appealed, to an inner circle of more thoughtful readers, they especially who in those

days discerned the signs of the approaching dismemberment of the kingdom and the diminution of the glory of Jerusalem would find their comfort in its lessons of patient endurance and resignation to the sovereign will of God. Whenever the Church has been threatened with approaching calamity this Book has always shewn its consolatory effect upon devout believers.<sup>6</sup> It served, before Christ came, to lighten for Jews the darkness of those "crooked" ways of God which have exercised the Christian penetration of Pascal and Butler. To the desolation of religious doubt, Ecclesiastes brings a special message of consolation and direction: for it shews that a cry of perplexity finds a place even in the sacred Books; and it indicates a nearer approach to the living God in reverent worship (v. 1), in active service (xi. 6), in humble acknowledgment of His power (iii. 10-17), in reliance on His final justice (v. 8, xii. 13, 14), as the means by which that cry has been, and may again be, hushed.

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine refers to it as setting forth the vanity of this life, only that we may desire that life wherein, instead of vanity beneath the sun, there is truth under Him Who made the sun. It was the same tendency which induced the author of the "De Imitatione Christi" to borrow from Ecclesiastes the key-note of his golden book.

# ECCLESIASTES;

OR,

## THE PREACHER.

CHAP. 1. THE words "of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

<sup>a</sup> ver. 12.  
ch. 7. 27.  
& 12. 8, 9, 10.  
<sup>b</sup> Ps. 39. 5, 6.  
& 62. 9.  
& 144. 4.  
ch. 12. 8.  
<sup>c</sup> Rom. 8. 20.  
<sup>d</sup> ch. 2. 22.  
& 3. 9.  
<sup>e</sup> Ps. 104. 5.  
& 119. 90.  
<sup>f</sup> Ps. 10. 5, 6.

- 2 <sup>b</sup>Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities;  
3 <sup>c</sup>all is vanity. <sup>d</sup>What profit hath a man of all his labour which  
4 he taketh under the sun? *One generation passeth away, and  
another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.*  
5 <sup>e</sup>The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and <sup>f</sup>hasteth to

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *panteth*.

I. 1-3. These introductory verses serve to describe the writer, and to state the subject of his Book.

1. *Preacher*] Lit. *Convener*. No one English word represents adequately the Heb. *Kohleth*. Though capable, according to Hebrew usage, of being applied to men in office, it is strictly a feminine participle, and describes a person in the act of calling together an assembly of people as if with the intention of addressing them. The word thus understood refers us to the action of Wisdom personified (Prov. i. 20, viii. 8). In Prov. and here Solomon seems to support two characters, speaking sometimes in the third person as Wisdom instructing the assembled people, at other times in the first person. So our Lord speaks of Himself (cp. Luke xi. 49 with Matt. xxiii. 34) as Wisdom, and as desiring (Luke xiii. 34) to gather the people together for instruction. It is unfortunate that the word "Preacher" does not bring this personification before English minds, but a different idea.

2. *Vanity*] This word (*Hebel*, or, when used as a proper name, in Gen. iv. 2, *Abel*), occurs no less than 37 times in Ecclesiastes, and has been called the key of the Book. Primarily it means "breath," "light wind;" and denotes that which (1) passes away more or less quickly and completely, (2) leaves either no result or no adequate result behind, and therefore (3) fails to satisfy the mind of man, which naturally craves for something permanent and progressive: it is also applied to (4) idols, as contrasted with the Living, Eternal, and Almighty God, and thus in the Hebrew mind it is connected with sin. In this Book it is applied to all works on earth, to pleasure, grandeur, wisdom, the life of man, childhood, youth, and length of days, the oblivion of the grave, wandering and unsatisfied desires, unenjoyed possessions, and anomalies in the moral government of the world.

Solomon speaks of the world-wide existence of "vanity," not with bitterness or

scorn, but as a fact, which forced itself on him as he advanced in knowledge of men and things, and which he regards with sorrow and perplexity. From such feelings he finds refuge by contrasting this with another fact, which he holds with equal firmness, viz. that the whole universe is made and is governed by a God of justice, goodness, and power. The place of vanity in the order of Divine Providence—unknown to Solomon, unless the answer be indicated in vii. 29—is explained to us by St. Paul, Romans viii., where its origin is traced to the subjugation and corruption of creation by sin as a consequence of the fall of man; and its extinction is declared to be reserved till after the Resurrection in the glory and liberty of the children of God.

*Vanity of vanities*] A well-known Hebrew idiom signifying vanity in the highest degree. Cp. the phrase, "Holy of Holies."

*all*] Solomon includes both the courses of nature and the works of man (cv. 4-11). Cp. Rom. viii. 22.

3. *What profit &c.*] The question often repeated is the great practical inquiry of the Book; it receives its final answer in xii. 13, 14. When this question was asked the Lord had not yet spoken (Matt. xi. 28). The word "profit" (or preeminence) is opposed to "vanity."

*hath a man*] Rather, *hath man*.

4-11. "Vanity" is shown in mankind, the elements, and all that moves on earth; the same course is repeated again and again without any permanent result or real progress; and events and men are alike forgotten.

4. *abideth*] The apparent permanence of the earth increases by contrast the transitory condition of its inhabitants.

*ever*] The word does not here absolutely signify "eternity" (cp. iii. 11 note), but a certainly short period (cp. Ex. xxi. 6): here it might be paraphrased "as long as this world, this present order of things, lasts."

5. *hasteth &c.*] Lit. *at his place panting* (in his eagerness) *riseth he there*.

- <sup>a</sup> John 3. 8. 6 his place where he arose. <sup>a</sup>The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.
- <sup>b</sup> Job 38. 10. 7 <sup>a</sup>All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they <sup>1</sup>return again. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: <sup>2</sup>the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
- <sup>c</sup> Prov. 27. 20. 8 again. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: <sup>2</sup>the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
- <sup>d</sup> ch. 3. 15. 9 <sup>2</sup>The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.
- <sup>e</sup> ver. 1. 12, 13 <sup>1</sup>I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: <sup>2</sup>this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man <sup>2</sup>to be exercised therewith.
- <sup>f</sup> Gen. 3. 19. ch. 3. 10. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, be-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. return to go.<sup>2</sup> Or, to afflict them.

6. More lit. Going towards the south and veering towards the north, veering, veering goes the wind; and to its veerings the wind returns.

7. the place] i.e. The spring or river-head. It would seem that the ancient Hebrews regarded the clouds as the immediate feeders of the springs (Prov. viii. 28, and Ps. civ. 10, 13). Gen. ii. 6 indicates some acquaintance with the process and result of evaporation.

8. All things...utter it] This clause, as here translated, refers to the immensity of labour. Others translate it, "all words are full of labour; they make weary the hearers," or "are feeble or insufficient" to tell the whole; and are referred to the impossibility of adequately describing labour.

9. hath been...is done] i.e. Hath happened in the course of nature...is done by man.

11. things] Rather, men.

12. Solomon relates his personal experience (ch. ii.); the result of which was "no profit," and a conviction that all, even God's gifts of earthly good to good men, in this life are subject to vanity. His trial of God's first gift, wisdom, is recounted in vv. 12-18.

was] This tense does not imply that Solomon had ceased to be king when the word was written. See Introduction, p. 424. He begins with the time of his accession to the throne, when the gifts of wisdom and riches were specially promised to him (1 K. iii. 12, 13).

13. wisdom] As including both the powers of observation and judgment, and the knowledge acquired thereby (1 K. iii. 28, iv. 29, x. 8 &c.). It increases by exercise. Here is noted its application to men and their actions.

travail] In the sense of toil; the word is here applied to all human occupations.

God] Thirty-nine times in this Book, God is named as Elohim; a name common to the true God and to false gods, and used by believers and by idolators: but the name Jehovah, by which He is known peculiarly to the people who are in Covenant with Him, is never once used.

Perhaps the chief reason for this is that the evil which is the object of inquiry in this Book is not at all peculiar to the chosen people. All creation (Rom. viii.) groans under it. The Preacher does not write of, or to, the Hebrew race exclusively. There is no express and obvious reference to their national expectations, the events of their national history, or even to the divine oracles which were deposited with them. Hence it was natural for the wisest and largest-hearted man of his race to take a wider range of observation than any other Hebrew writer before or after him. It became the sovereign of many peoples whose religions diverged more or less remotely from the true religion, to address himself to a more extensive sphere than that which was occupied by the twelve tribes, and to adapt his language accordingly. See v. 1 note.

14. vexation of spirit] A phrase which occurs 7 times, and may be otherwise translated, feeding on wind. Modern Heb. grammarians assert that the word rendered "vexation" must be derived from a root signifying "to feed," "follow," "strive after." This being admitted, it remains to choose between two translations: (1) "Striving after wind," or "windy effort;" adopted by the LXX. and the majority of modern interpreters; or (2) feeding on wind. Cp. Hos. xii. 1: and similar phrases in Prov. xv. 14; Isai. xlv. 20; Ps. xxxvii. 3.

15 hold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and <sup>1</sup>that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten <sup>o</sup>more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart <sup>2</sup>had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>3</sup>And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For <sup>4</sup>in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

CHAP. 2. "I SAID in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, <sup>b</sup>this also *is* vanity. "I said of laughter, *It is* mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? <sup>3</sup>"I sought in mine heart <sup>3</sup>to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven <sup>4</sup>all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: <sup>5</sup>I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had <sup>5</sup>servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jeru-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. defect.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. had seen much.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. to draw my flesh with wine.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. the number of the days of their life.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. sons of my house.

15. He saw clearly both the disorder and incompleteness of human actions (cp. marg. ref.), and also man's impotence to rectify them.

16. *I am come &c.*] Rather, I have accumulated (lit. "enlarged and added") wisdom more than &c.

*they that have been &c.*] The reference is probably to the line of Canaanitish kings who lived in Jerusalem before David took it, such as Melchizedek (Gen. xiv. 18), Adonizedec (Josh. x. 1), and Araunah (2 Sam. xxiv. 23); or, it may be, to Solomon's contemporaries of his own country (1 K. iv. 31) and of other countries who visited him (1 K. iv. 34, x. 24). For "in" Jerusalem render over.

17. *to know madness and folly*] A knowledge of folly would help him to discern wisdom, and to exercise that chief function of practical wisdom—to avoid folly.

18. We become more sensible of our ignorance and impotence, and therefore sorrowful, in proportion as we discover more of the constitution of nature and the scheme of Providence in the government of the world; every discovery serving to convince us that more remains concealed of which we had no suspicion before.

II. 1-11. Solomon's trial of God's second gift, viz. riches, and the enjoyment which riches supply; this brought him to the same result (cp. i. 12).

Comparing Solomon's action with Luke xii. 16-21, it must be remembered that

Solomon's object was the acquisition of wisdom, not self-indulgence, and that he did not fail to look forward to the certainty of death overtaking him.

3. *I sought &c.*] Rather, I resolved (lit. "I turned in my heart") to draw my flesh with wine (see marg.), my heart guiding me with wisdom. In the course of his attempt to answer the question of i. 3, whilst his heart was directing him (as a charioteer directs his horses or a shepherd his sheep) with wisdom, and whilst he was following that guidance, he determined to draw with him his flesh by wine, thus making his flesh, which he speaks of as distinct from himself (cp. Rom. vii. 25), a confederate and subsidiary in his attempt.

4-10. Cp. 1 K. vii. 1-12, ix. 15-19, x. 14-27, and 2 Chr. viii. 4.

5. *orchards*] Lit. "paradises," i.e. parks or pleasure-grounds (cp. Neh. ii. 8 note). Indications of at least three of these have been pointed out; one at Jerusalem near the pool of Siloam, called "the king's garden" (Neh. iii. 15; Jer. lii. 7); a second near Bethlehem (cp. r. 6); and a third in the remote north, on the heights of Hermon (Song of Sol. iv. 8, viii. 11).

6. *pools*] A short distance south of Bethlehem, in a valley in the defile of Urtas, three "Pools of Solomon" are still shewn and an adjoining hill still bears the name of the "Little Paradise."

7. *I got*] Rather, I bought, in distinction from those born in the house. The "child-

- \* 1 K. 9.23. & 10. 10. 11. 21, &c.  
 f ch. 1. 16. 8 salem before me : \* I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces : I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as <sup>1</sup> musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So <sup>1</sup> I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem :  
 10 also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy ; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour : and <sup>2</sup> this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do : and, behold, all <sup>3</sup> was <sup>4</sup> vanity and vexation of spirit, and <sup>4</sup> there was no profit under the sun.  
 12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, <sup>5</sup> and madness, and folly : for what <sup>5</sup> can the man do that cometh after the king ?  
 13 <sup>6</sup> even that which hath been already done. Then I saw <sup>7</sup> that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. <sup>8</sup> The wise man's eyes <sup>8</sup> are in his head ; but the fool walketh in darkness : and I myself perceived also that <sup>9</sup> one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it <sup>9</sup> happeneth even to me ; and why was I then more wise ?  
 16 Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For <sup>10</sup> there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever ; seeing that which now <sup>10</sup> is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise <sup>11</sup> man ? as the fool. Therefore

<sup>1</sup> Heb. musical instrument and instruments.

<sup>2</sup> Or, in those things which

<sup>3</sup> have been already done.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. that there is an excellency in wisdom more

<sup>5</sup> than in folly, &c.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. happeneth to me, even to me.

dren of Solomon's servants" (cp. Ezra ii. 55, 58) were more probably of Canaanitish origin (1 K. ix. 20, 21, v. 15) than Hebrews (1 K. ix. 22).

possessions of great and small cattle] Rather, herds of oxen and sheep.

all...before me] King David's herds and flocks are mentioned in 1 Chr. xxvii. 29, 31 : but we have no specific account of the wealth of other Canaanitish or Hebrew inhabitants of Jerusalem before Solomon.

8. kings] Both tributary (1 K. x. 15) and independent (1 K. v. 1, ix. 14, x. 2) ; the "provinces" probably correspond to the kingdoms mentioned in 1 K. iv. 21.

as musical...sorts] Rather, Many women (cp. 1 K. xi. 1-3).

10. portion] A word of frequent occurrence. By it Solomon describes the pleasure found in the act of working and also perhaps the pleasure felt in the process of acquiring wisdom ; this pleasure is admitted to be good, if received from God (v. 26, v. 18 ; cp. 1 Tim. iv. 4) ; but being transitory it is subject to vanity, and therefore does not afford a sufficient answer to the repeated question, "What profit &c.?" (i. 3).

12-26. Solomon having found that wisdom and folly agree in being subject to vanity, now contrasts one with the other (v. 13). Both are brought under vanity by events (v. 14) which come on the wise man and the fool alike from without—death and oblivion (v. 16), uncertainty (v. 19), disap-

pointment (v. 21)—all happening by an external law beyond human control. Amidst this vanity, the good (see v. 10 note) that accrues to man, is the pleasure felt (24-26) in receiving God's gifts, and in working with and for them.

12. what can the man do &c.] i.e. "What is any man—in this study of wisdom and folly—after one like me, who, from my position, have had such peculiar advantages (see i. 16, and cp. ii. 25) for carrying it on ? That which man did of old he can but do again : he is not likely to add to the result of my researches, nor even to equal them." Some hold that the "man" is a reference to Solomon's successor—not in his inquiries, but in his kingdom, i.e. Jeroboam.

14. event] Or, "hap" (Ruth ii. 3). The verb from which it is derived seems in this Book to refer specially to death. The word does not mean chance (cp. ix. 1, 2), independent of the ordering of Divine Providence : the Gentile notion of "mere chance," or "blind fate," is never once contemplated by the writer of this Book, and it would be inconsistent with his tenets of the unlimited power and activity of God.

16. seeing that &c.] Cp. i. 11. Some render, "as in time past, so in days to come, all will be forgotten ;" others, "because in the days to come all will have been long before forgotten."

17. I hated life] Cp. this expression, ex-



- I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is  
 18 grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea,  
 I hated all my labour which I had <sup>1</sup> taken under the sun: be-  
 cause <sup>m</sup> I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. <sup>m</sup> Ps. 42. 10.  
 19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet  
 shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured,  
 and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is*  
 20 also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to de-  
 21 spair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there  
 is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in  
 equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he  
<sup>2</sup> leave it for his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil.  
 22 <sup>n</sup> For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his  
 23 heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his  
 days *are* <sup>o</sup> sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh  
 not rest in the night. This is also vanity. <sup>o</sup> Job 5. 7.  
 24 <sup>p</sup> *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat*  
*and drink, and that he* <sup>p</sup> *should make his soul enjoy good in his*  
*labour.* This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God. <sup>p</sup> ch. 3. 12,  
 13, 22.  
 25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I? <sup>p</sup> & 5. 18,  
 & 8. 16.  
 26 For God giveth to a man that *is* good <sup>q</sup> in his sight wisdom, and  
 knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to  
 gather and to heap up, that <sup>q</sup> he may give to him *that is* good  
 before God. This also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. <sup>q</sup> Job 27. 10,  
 17.  
<sup>r</sup> Prov. 29. 8.  
<sup>s</sup> ver. 17.  
<sup>t</sup> ch. 8. 6.

**CHAP. 3.** TO every thing there is a season, and a <sup>a</sup> time to every pur-  
 pose under the heaven:

<sup>1</sup> Heb. laboured.

<sup>2</sup> Or, delight his senses.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. before him, Gen. 7. 1.  
 Luke 1. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. give.

torted from Solomon by the perception of  
 the vanity of his wisdom and greatness,  
 with Rom. viii. 22, 23. The words of Moses  
 (Num. xi. 15), and of Job (iii. 21, vi. 9), are  
 scarcely less forcible. This feeling is with  
 some men a powerful motive to conversion  
 (Luke xiv. 26).

19. labour] Cp. vv. 4-8.

20. I went about] i.e. I turned from one  
 course of action to another.

23. are sorrows...grief] Rather, sorrows  
 and grief are his toil. See i. 13.

24. nothing better for a man, than that &c.]  
 Lit. no good in man that &c. The one joy  
 of working or receiving, which, though it  
 be transitory, a man recognizes as a real  
 good, even that is not in the power of man  
 to secure for himself: that good is the gift  
 of God.

26. The doctrine of Retribution, or, the  
 revealed fact that God is the moral Govern-  
 or of the world, is here stated for the first  
 time (cp. iii. 15, 17, &c.) in this Book.

This also *is* vanity] Not only the travail  
 of the sinner. Even the best gifts of God,  
 wisdom, knowledge, and joy, so far as they  
 are given in this life, are not permanent,  
 and are not always (see ix. 11) efficacious  
 for the purpose for which they appear to be  
 given.

III. 1-15. It follows from ii. 26 that the  
 works of men are subject in their results to  
 another will (God's) besides that of the doer.

Here is the germ of the great question of  
 later times—how to reconcile man's freewill  
 with God's decrees. Solomon's way of stat-  
 ing it is that to every separate work, which  
 goes to make up the great aggregate of  
 human activity (the "travail," v. 10), there  
 is a season, an appropriate time which God  
 appoints for its being done (vv. 1-8). To  
 the question (v. 9) What profit? he answers  
 that the works of men, if done according to  
 God's appointment, are a part of that beau-  
 tifully arranged scheme of Divine Provi-  
 dence which, as a whole, is, by reason of its  
 extent and duration, incomprehensible to  
 us (v. 11). Man's good is to rejoice and do  
 good in his lifetime, which he can do only  
 as God appoints (vv. 12, 13). God's work,  
 of which this would be a part, is for ever,  
 is perfect (and so not subject to vanity), and  
 is calculated to teach men to fear Him  
 (v. 14). His work, which was begun long  
 ago, is now going on to completion; His  
 work hereafter will be a complement of  
 something which was done previously; and  
 He recalls the past in order to add to it  
 what shall make it complete and perfect  
 (v. 15). The principle of Divine government  
 —that every work in order to be permanent  
 and successful must be God's work as well  
 as man's work—is also declared in Ps.  
 cxxvii. 1, 2 (attributed to Solomon).

1. every thing] More particularly the ac-  
 tions of men (e.g. his own, ii. 1-8) and

- Heb. 9. 27. 2 A time <sup>1</sup>to be born, and <sup>2</sup>a time to die;  
                   A time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is planted*;  
 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
                   A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
                   A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones  
                   together;  
 • Joel 2. 16. 6 A time to embrace, and <sup>7</sup>a time <sup>2</sup>to refrain from embracing;  
 1 Cor. 7. 5. 6 A time to <sup>3</sup>get, and a time to lose;  
                   A time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew;  
 • Amos 5. 13. <sup>4</sup>A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
 • Luke 14. 26. 8 A time to love, and a time to <sup>5</sup>hate;  
                   A time of war, and a time of peace.  
 / ch. 1. 3. 9 /What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he la-  
                   boureth?  
 • ch. 1. 13. 10 <sup>6</sup>I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of  
 11 men to be exercised in it. He hath made every *thing* beautiful  
                   in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that  
 • ch. 8. 17. <sup>7</sup>no man can find out the work that God maketh from the be-  
 Rom. 11. 33. 12 ginning to the end. <sup>8</sup>I know that *there is* no good in them, but  
 1 ver. 22. 12 ginning to the end. <sup>8</sup>I know that *there is* no good in them, but  
 • ch. 2. 24. 13 for *a man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also <sup>9</sup>that  
                   every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his  
 14 labour, *it is* the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth,  
 15 Jam. 1. 17. it shall be for ever: <sup>10</sup>nothing can be put to it, nor anything  
                   taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before  
 • ch. 1. 9. 15 him. <sup>11</sup>That which hath been is now; and that which is to be  
                   hath already been; and God requireth <sup>12</sup>that which is past.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *to bear*.<sup>2</sup> Heb. *to be far from*.<sup>3</sup> Or, *seek*.<sup>4</sup> Heb. *that which is driven away*.

events which happen to men, the world of Providence rather than the world of creation. It would seem that most of his own works described in ii. 1-8 were present to his mind. The rare word translated "season" means emphatically "fitting time" (cp. Neh. ii. 6; Esth. ix. 27, 31).

5. Stones may be regarded either as materials for building, or as impediments to the fertility of land (see 2 K. iii. 19, 25; Isai. v. 2).

6. *get...lose*] Rather, seek, and a time to give up for lost.

7. *rend*] *i.e.* Tear garments in sign of mourning or anger. See 2 Sam. i. 2, 11 &c.

11. Rather, **He hath made all** (the travail, *v.* 10) beautiful (fit, in harmony with the whole work of God) in its time; also **He hath set eternity in their heart** (*i.e.* the heart of the sons of men, *v.* 10).

The word, translated "world" in the text, and "eternity" in this note, is used seven times in Ecclesiastes.

The interpretation "eternity," is conceived in the sense of a long indefinite period of time, in accordance with the use of the word throughout this Book, and the rest of the Old Testament. God has placed in the inborn constitution of man the capa-

bility of conceiving of eternity, the struggle to apprehend the everlasting, the longing after an eternal life.

With the other meaning "the world," *i.e.* the material world, or universe, in which we dwell, the context is explained as referring either to the knowledge of the objects with which this world is filled, or to the love of the pleasures of the world. This meaning seems to be less in harmony with the context than the other: but the principal objection to it is that it assigns to the word in the original a sense which, although found in Rabbinical Hebrew, it never bears in the language of the Old Testament.

*so...find*] *i.e.* Without enabling man to find. Cp. vii. 13, viii. 17.

12. *in them*] *i.e.* in the sons of men.

*to do good*] In a moral sense. Physical enjoyment is referred to in *v.* 13.

14. The last clause of this verse goes beyond a declaration of the fact of God's government of the world (ii. 26) by adding the moral effect which that fact is calculated to produce on those who see it. It is the first indication of the practical conclusion (xii. 13) of the Book.

15. Rather, **What has been—that was before, and that which shall be has been**

- 16 And moreover <sup>1</sup>I saw under the sun the place of judgment, <sup>2</sup>that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, <sup>3</sup>that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, <sup>4</sup>God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* <sup>5</sup>a time there for every purpose and for every work.
- 17 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, <sup>6</sup>that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. <sup>7</sup>For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all *is* vanity.
- 20 All go unto one place; <sup>8</sup>all are of the dust, and all turn to dust <sup>9</sup>again. <sup>10</sup>Who knoweth the spirit <sup>11</sup>of man that <sup>12</sup>goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? <sup>13</sup>Wherefore I perceive that *there is* nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for *that is*

<sup>1</sup> Or, *that they might clear God, and see, &c.*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *of the sons of man.*

<sup>3</sup> Heb. *is ascending.*

<sup>4</sup> ch. 5. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 2.

<sup>6</sup> 7, 8.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 5. 10.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Thess. 1.

<sup>9</sup> 6, 7.

<sup>10</sup> ver. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 40. 12,

<sup>12</sup> 20, & 73. 22.

<sup>13</sup> ch. 2. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 3. 10.

<sup>15</sup> ch. 12. 7.

<sup>16</sup> ver. 12.

<sup>17</sup> ch. 2. 24.

<sup>18</sup> & 5. 18.

<sup>19</sup> & 11. 9.

<sup>20</sup> ch. 2. 10.

before. The word "is" in our A.V. is erroneously printed in Roman letters: it does not exist in the Hebrew; and the word there translated "now" is the same which is translated "already."

*requireth*] i.e. requireth for judgment, as the word specially means in 2 Sam. iv. 11; Ezek. iii. 18 &c. It is obvious from the context of the last clause of v. 14, and v. 16, 17, that this is the meaning here.

*past*] Lit. "put to flight."

The meaning of the verse is that there is a connexion between events, past, present and future, and that this connexion exists in the justice of God Who controls all.

16-22. That great anomaly in the moral government of this world, the seemingly unequal distribution of rewards and punishments, will be rectified by God, Who has future times and events under His control (v. 16, 17). As for men, they are placed by God, Who is their teacher, in a humble condition, even on a level with inferior animals, by death, that great instance of their subjection to vanity (v. 18, 19), which reduces to its original form all that was made of the dust of the ground (v. 20). And though the destinies of man and beast are different, yet in our present want of knowledge as to God's future dealing with our spirits (v. 21), man finds his portion (see ii. 10 note) in such labour and such joy as God assigns to him in his lifetime (v. 22).

16. *I saw &c.*] Rather, I have seen (as in v. 10) under the sun the place &c. The place of judgment means the seat of the authorized judge. Compare "the place of the holy" (viii. 10).

17. *a time there*] i.e. a time with God.

18. Lit. I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men, *it is* that God may prove them and shew them that they are

beasts, they themselves. "Shewing" is the reading of the LXX. and Syriac: the present Hebrew text reads "seeing." The meaning is that the long delay of God's judgment (v. 16, 17) is calculated to shew men that the brevity of their life renders them incapable of following out and understanding His distributive justice.

19. *that which befalleth the sons of men*] Lit. the event or hap of the sons of men, i.e. that which comes upon them from without, in virtue of the ordinance of God. See ii. 14 note. Death in particular (v. 2, 11) is a part of the "work that God doeth."

21. The A.V. of this verse is the only rendering which the Hebrew text, as now pointed, allows. It is in accordance with the best Jewish and many modern interpreters. A slightly different pointing would be requisite to authorize the translation, "Who knows the spirit of the sons of man whether it goes above, and the spirit of the beast whether it goes down below?" &c., which, though it seems neither necessary nor suitable, is sanctioned by the LXX. and other Versions and by some modern interpreters.

*Who knoweth*] This expression (used also in ii. 19, vi. 12) does not necessarily imply complete and absolute ignorance. In Ps. xc. 11, it is applied to that which is partially understood: compare similar forms of expression in Prov. xxxi. 10; Ps. xciv. 16; Isai. liii. 1. Moreover it is evident from marg. ref. that Solomon did not doubt the future existence and destination of the soul. This verse can only be construed as a confession of much ignorance on the subject.

22. *what shall be after him*] i.e. What shall become of the results of his work after he is dead. Cp. ii. 19, vi. 12.

\* ch. 6. 12.  
 & 8. 7.  
 & 10. 14.  
 \* ch. 3. 10.  
 & 5. 8.

<sup>b</sup> Job 3. 17,  
 &c.

<sup>c</sup> Job 3. 11,  
 16, 21.  
 ch. 6. 3.

<sup>d</sup> Prov. 6. 10,  
 & 24. 33.  
<sup>e</sup> Prov. 15.  
 16, 17.  
 & 16. 8.

<sup>f</sup> Prov. 27.  
 20.  
<sup>g</sup> John 2. 16.  
<sup>h</sup> Ps. 39. 6.

his portion : \*for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

CHAP. 4. SO I returned, and considered all the <sup>a</sup>oppressions that are done under the sun : and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the <sup>b</sup>side of their oppressors *there was* power ; but they had no comforter. <sup>b</sup>Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. <sup>c</sup>Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

4 Again, I considered all travail, and <sup>e</sup>every right work, that <sup>f</sup>for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This *is* also vanity <sup>g</sup>and vexation of spirit. <sup>h</sup>The fool foldeth his hands together, <sup>h</sup>and eateth his own flesh. <sup>h</sup>Better *is* an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

7, 8 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and *there is* not a second ; yea, he hath neither child nor brother : yet *is there* no end of all his labour ; neither is his <sup>i</sup>eye satisfied with riches ; <sup>j</sup>neither *saieth he*, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good ? This *is* also vanity, yea, it *is* a sore travail.

9 Two *are* better than one ; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow : but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth ; for *he hath* not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat : but how can one be warm *alone* ? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him ; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better *is* a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *hand*.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *all the righteousness of work*.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. *this is the envy of a man from his neighbour*.

IV. Having arrived (iii. 22) at a partial answer to his question (i. 3) ; viz. that there is positive good (= a portion) in that satisfaction which is found in working, Solomon now turns to the case of such happiness being interrupted and reduced to vanity by various contingencies—by oppression (vv. 1-3) ; by envy (vv. 4-6) ; by loneliness (vv. 7-12) ; and by decay of working power (vv. 13-16). The first two instances seem taken from the lower ranks of life, the last two from the higher.

1. *So I returned, and considered*] Rather, *And I returned and saw*. He turns to look on other phenomena, and to test by them his previous conclusion.

*oppressed*] See Introduction, p. 424.

4. *every right work*] Rather, *every success in work*.

*for this &c.*] i.e. "This successful work makes the worker an object of envy." Some understand the meaning to be, "this work is the effect of the rivalry of man with his neighbour."

5. *foldeth his hands*] The envious man is here exhibited in the attitude of the sluggard (marg. ref.).

*eateth his own flesh*] i.e. "Destroys him-

self." cp. a similar expression in Isai. xlix. 26 ; Ps. xxvii. 2 ; Mic. iii. 3.

6. Either the fool's sarcasm on his successful but restless neighbour ; or the comment of Solomon recommending contentment with a moderate competence. The former meaning seems preferable.

7-12. The spectacle of a prosperous man whose condition is rendered vain by his brotherless, childless isolation.

8. *a second*] Any one associated or connected with him.

9-12. Cp. a saying from the Talmud, "A man without companions is like the left hand without the right."

13-16. These verses set forth the vanity of earthly prosperity even on a throne. Opinion as to their application is chiefly divided between considering them a parable or fiction like that of the childless man in v. 8 : or as setting forth first the vicissitudes of royal life in two proverbial sayings (vv. 13, 14), and then (vv. 15, 16), the vicissitudes or procession of the whole human race, one generation giving place to another, which in its turn will be forgotten by its successor. On the whole, the first appears to have the better claim.

13. *child*] Rather, *young man*.

14 <sup>1</sup> who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also *he that is born in his kingdom* becometh 15 poor. I considered all the living which walk under the sun, 16 with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. *There is* no end of all the people, *even* of all that have been before them: they also that have come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

CHAP. 5. KEEP <sup>a</sup>thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, <sup>b</sup>than to give the sacrifice of fools: 2 for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* <sup>c</sup>thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words <sup>c</sup>be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and <sup>d</sup>a fool's voice *is known* by multitude 4 of words. <sup>e</sup>When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: <sup>f</sup>pay that which thou 5 hast vowed. <sup>g</sup>Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that 6 thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; <sup>h</sup>neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *who knoweth not to be admonished.*

<sup>2</sup> Or, *word.*

<sup>a</sup> See Ex. 3. 5. Isai. 1. 12, &c.  
<sup>b</sup> 1 Sam. 15. 22.  
<sup>c</sup> Ps. 50. 8.  
<sup>d</sup> Prov. 15. 8.  
<sup>e</sup> Hos. 6. 6.  
<sup>f</sup> Prov. 10. 10.  
<sup>g</sup> Matt. 5. 7.  
<sup>h</sup> Prov. 10. 19.  
<sup>i</sup> Num. 30. 2.  
<sup>j</sup> Deut. 23. 21.  
<sup>k</sup> Ps. 50. 14.  
<sup>l</sup> Ps. 66. 13.  
<sup>m</sup> Prov. 20. 25.  
<sup>n</sup> Acts 5. 4.  
<sup>o</sup> 1 Cor. 11. 10.

14. Rather, For out of the house of bondage he goes forth to be a king; although he was born poor in his kingdom, *i.e.* in the country over which he became king.

15. *I considered &c.* Lit. I saw "all the population of the young man's kingdom." *the second child* [This second youth is generally understood to be identical with the one mentioned in v. 13.

16. *There is* Rather. *There was.* *that have been before them* Rather, before whom he was, *i.e.* at the head of whom the young king was. Cp. Micah ii. 13. *they also that...him* *i.e.* The next generation shall forget this chosen king.

V. The Preacher now begins to address his hearer in the second person. The soliloquy, hitherto unbroken, is henceforth interrupted by personal addresses, which are repeated with increasing frequency from this place to the end of the Book. They who divide the whole Book into two parts, the first theoretical, the second practical, begin the second division here.

There is a striking resemblance between the line of thought pursued in this Book and that of Asaph in Psalm lxxiii. As the Psalmist, so the Preacher, after setting forth his view of human life, takes his hearer into the house of God for an explanation and directions. If the expression "goest to the house of God" (v. 1) has also the spiritual sense of entering into communion with God, Solomon here admonishes generally that reverence is due to God, and particularly that the "vanity" which is mingled with the "portion" that God assigns to every man, ought to be treated as a divine

mystery, not to be made an occasion of idle thought, hasty words, and rash resolutions, but to be considered in the fear of God (vv. 1-7); that the spectacle of unjust oppression is to be patiently referred to God's supreme judgment (vv. 8, 9); that mere riches are unsatisfying, bring care with them, and if hoarded are transitory (vv. 10-17); and that a man's enjoyment of his portion in life, including both labour and riches, is the gift of God (vv. 18-20).

1. *Keep thy foot* *i.e.* Give thy mind to what thou art going to do.

*the house of God* It has been said that here an ordinary devout Hebrew writer might have been expected to call it "the house of Jehovah;" but to those who accept this Book as the work of Solomon after his fall into idolatry, it will appear a natural sign of the writer's self-humiliation, an acknowledgment of his unworthiness of the privileges of a son of the Covenant, that he avoids the name of the Lord of the Covenant (see i. 13 note).

*be more ready to hear* Perhaps in the sense that, "to draw near for the purpose of hearing (and obeying) is better than &c."

6. *Suffer not thy mouth &c.* *i.e.* Do not make rash vows which may hereafter be the cause of evasion and prevarication, and remain unfulfilled.

*before the angel* The LXX. and some other Versions render "before the face of God," meaning a spiritual being representing the Presence of God, a minister of divine justice (Exod. xxiii. 21), such an one as inflicted judgment upon David (2 Sam. xxiv. 17). Others, with less probability, understand

- 7 and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are also divers vanities*: but 'fear thou God.
- <sup>1</sup> ch. 12. 13. <sup>2</sup> ch. 3. 16. <sup>3</sup> Ps. 12. 5. & 58. 11. & 82. 1.
- 8 If thou <sup>2</sup>seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not <sup>1</sup>at the matter: for <sup>1</sup>he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and <sup>9</sup>there be higher than they. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field.
- 10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he 11 that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is *there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of *them* 12 with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.
- <sup>m</sup> ch. 6. 1. 13 <sup>m</sup>There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, 14 riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and *there* 15 is nothing in his hand. <sup>a</sup>As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. 16 And this also is a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and <sup>o</sup>what profit hath he <sup>r</sup>that hath laboured for 17 the wind? all his days also <sup>2</sup>he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.
- 18 Behold *that* which I have seen: <sup>r2</sup>it is good and comely *for* one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun <sup>3</sup>all the days of his life, which God 19 giveth him: <sup>4</sup>for it is his portion. <sup>4</sup>Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; 20 this is the gift of God. <sup>4</sup>For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.
- <sup>a</sup> ch. 5. 13. **CHAP. 6.** <sup>a</sup>THERE is an evil which I have seen under the sun,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. at the will, or, purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. there is a good which

is comely, &c.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. the number of the days.

<sup>4</sup> Or, Though he give not much, yet he remembereth, &c.

the Angel to be a priest, and refer to Mal. ii. 7.

7. For...vanities] Or, For so it happens through many dreams and vanities and many words.

8. matter] Rather, purpose (as in marg., and iii. 1), referring either to the will of God or to the edict of an oppressive ruler.

for he...they] Lit. for high watches over high and the Highest over them, i.e. the king in the capital watches over the judge or governor in the province, and God over both. This seems more in harmony with the preceding verses, and more agreeable to the scope of this passage than to understand the passage only of earthly rulers.

9. the king himself is served by the field] Rather, the king is subject to the field, i.e. is dependent on its cultivation. The higher ranks, if they oppress the lower, lose thereby their own means of subsistence.

11. they...that eat them] i.e. The labourers employed, and the household servants.

12. labouring man] Not a slave (LXX.), but every one who, according to the divine direction, earns his bread in the sweat of his brow.

14. evil travail] Adverse accident, or unsuccessful employment (cp. i. 13, iv. 8).

17. hath much sorrow &c.] Rather, is very sad and hath pain and vexation.

18. Rather, Behold what I have seen to be good, it is pleasant for a man to eat. Such thankful enjoyment is inculcated by the Law (Deut. xii. 7, 18).

20. The days will pass smoothly and pleasantly, whilst he lives in the consciousness of God's favour.

answereth him] i.e. grants his prayers.

VI. The Preacher in this chapter contemplates the case of men to whom God gives wealth, honour, success, children, and

- 2 and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, <sup>b</sup>so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and <sup>d</sup>also that he have no burial; I say, <sup>e</sup>that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity; and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?
- 7 <sup>f</sup>All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the <sup>g</sup>appetite is not filled. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes <sup>h</sup>than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit. That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: <sup>i</sup>neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. Seeing there be

<sup>b</sup> Job 21. 10, &c.  
<sup>c</sup> Ps. 17. 14, & 73. 7.  
<sup>d</sup> Luke 12.

<sup>e</sup> 2 K. 9. 35.  
<sup>f</sup> Isai. 14. 19, 20.  
<sup>g</sup> Jer. 22. 19.  
<sup>h</sup> Job 3. 10.  
<sup>i</sup> Ps. 68. 8.  
ch. 4. 3.

<sup>j</sup> Prov. 16. 26.

<sup>k</sup> Job 9. 32.  
<sup>l</sup> Isai. 45. 9.  
Jer. 40. 19.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. soul.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. than the walking of the soul.

long life, yet withholdeth from them the capacity of enjoyment, rest, permanence or contentment (cv. 1-9). What then is good for man to do, whose lot in life is so thoroughly subject to vanity? (vv. 10-12).

1. common among] Rather, great (heavy) upon men.

3. no burial] For a corpse to lie unburied was a circumstance in itself of peculiar ignominy and dishonour (cp. marg. ref.).

4. he...his] Rather, it...its. The untimely birth is spoken of.

5. Rather, it hath not seen nor known the sun: this (the untimely birth) hath rest rather than the other.

6. he live] Rather, he hath lived. "He" refers to the man (v. 3). His want of satisfaction in life, and the dishonour done to his corpse, are regarded as such great evils that they counterbalance his numerous children, and length of days, and render his lot viewed as a whole no better than the common lot of all.

7-9. Connect these verses with vv. 2, 3:—"All labour is undertaken with a view to some profit, but as a rule the men who labour are never satisfied. What advantage then has he who labours if (being rich) he is wise, or if being poor he knows how to conduct himself properly; what advantage have such labourers above a fool? (None, so far as they are without contentment; for) a thing present before the eyes is preferable to a future which exists only in the desire."

8. what] Lit. what profit (as in i. 3). knoweth...living] i.e. "Knows how to conduct himself rightly among his contemporaries."

10. Or, "That which has been named—i.e. events past or current, either (i. 9) as they present themselves to man, or (iii. 15) as they are ordered by God—was long ago (i.e. was decreed, its nature and place were defined by the Almighty), and was known that it is man;" i.e. the course of events shapes the conduct and character of man, so that what he does and suffers is said to be or constitute the man. God from the beginning definitely ordained the course of events external to man, and constituted man in such a way that events materially affect his conduct and his destiny. Hence God, by withholding from certain men the gift of contentment, and thus subjecting them to vanity, is acting according to the predetermined course of His Providence which man cannot alter (cp. Rom. viii. 20). Others translate, "What there is, its name is named long ago and known, that it is man;" i.e. "What hath been and is, not only came into existence long ago (i. 9, iii. 15), but also has been known and named, and is acknowledged that it, besides other things, is specially man; that man always remains the same, and cannot go beyond his appointed bounds."

him that is mightier] i.e. God; cp. ix. 1; 1 Cor. x. 22, and marg. ref.

11. things] Namely, the various circumstances detailed in the foregoing chapters, from the Preacher's personal experience, and his observation of other men, ending with the comprehensive declaration in v. 10 to the effect that vanity is an essential part of the constitution of creation as it now exists, and was foreknown.

what is man the better?] Rather, what is profitable to man?

12 many things that increase vanity, what *is* man the better? For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, <sup>1</sup>all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as <sup>2</sup>a shadow? for <sup>3</sup>who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

<sup>a</sup> Ps. 102. 11.  
& 109. 23.  
Jam. 4. 14.  
<sup>i</sup> Ps. 39. 6.  
ch. 8. 7.  
<sup>c</sup> Prov. 15. 30.  
& 22. 1.

CHAP. 7. A "GOOD" name *is* better than precious ointment;  
And the day of death than the day of one's birth.

2 *It is* better to go to the house of mourning,  
Than to go to the house of feasting:  
For that *is* the end of all men;  
And the living will lay *it* to his heart.

3 <sup>2</sup>Sorrow *is* better than laughter:

<sup>b</sup> 2 Cor. 7. 10. <sup>1</sup>For by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

4 The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning;  
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

<sup>c</sup> See  
Ps. 141. 5.  
Prov. 13. 19.  
<sup>d</sup> Ps. 118. 12.  
ch. 2. 2.

5 <sup>e</sup>*It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise,  
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.

6 <sup>f</sup>For as the <sup>3</sup>crackling of thorns under a pot,  
So *is* the laughter of the fool: this also *is* vanity.

7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad;

<sup>e</sup> Ex. 23. 8.  
Deut. 16. 19.

<sup>g</sup>And a gift destroyeth the heart.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *the number of the days of the life of his vanity.*

<sup>2</sup> Or, *Anger.*  
<sup>3</sup> Heb. *sound.*

12. *after him*] i.e. On earth, in his own present sphere of action, after his departure hence (cp. ii. 19, iii. 22).

VII. Chs. vii. and x. shew a striking resemblance to the style of the writer of the Book of Proverbs. Hitherto the principal object has been to state the vanity of the conditions of human life: henceforth the principal object will be to direct man how to conduct himself under those conditions.

The general drift of the writer's counsels throughout the last six chapters, and particularly in vii. 1-22, points to wisdom united with the fear of God as the "good for man in this life." It is illustrated by frequent reference to, and contrast with, that evil which consists of folly allied with wickedness.

1. *name...ointment*] The likeness between reputation and odour supplies a common metaphor: the contrast is between reputation, as an honourable attainment which only wise men win, and fragrant odour, as a gratification of the senses which all men enjoy.

The connexion of this verse with the preceding verses is this:—the man, who wants to know what is profitable for man and good in this life, is here told to act in such a way as ordinarily secures a good reputation (i.e. to act like a wise man), and to teach himself this hard lesson,—to regard the day of death as preferable to the day of birth. Though Solomon seems in some places to feel strongly (ii. 16, iii. 19, 20 &c.) that natural fear of death which is, in a great measure, mistrust founded on

the ignorance which Christ dispelled; yet he states the advantage of death over life in respect of its freedom from toil, oppression, restlessness (ii. 17, iv. 2, vi. 5), and in respect of its implying an immediate and a nearer approach to God (iii. 21, xii. 7). While Solomon preferred the day of death, he might still (with Luther here) have regarded birth as a good thing, and as having its place in the creation of God.

2. *that*] Namely, what is seen in the house of mourning.

*lay it to his heart*] Consider it attentively.

3. *Sorrow*] Rather, Seriousness.

*the heart is made better*] i.e. is made bright and joyful (cp. 2 Cor. vi. 10). The mind which bears itself equally in human concerns, whether they be pleasant or sorrowful, must always be glad, free, and at peace.

4. *house of mourning...house of mirth*] These phrases acquire a forcible significance from the Eastern custom of prolonging both festive and mournful celebrations through several days. See Gen. i. 10; Judg. xiv. 17. This verse indicates that a life of enjoyment, does not mean the abandonment of ourselves to pleasures, but the thankful and sober use of the beautiful things which God gives us.

6. *as the crackling of thorns*] Noisy while it lasts, and quickly extinguished. See Ps. lviii. 9 note.

7. Rather, oppression (or extortion) maketh a wise man foolish; and a bribe &c. If a wise man, being in a high position, exercises oppression (see Ps. lxii. 10), or practises extortion, he becomes a fool in



- 8 Better *is* the end of a thing than the beginning thereof:  
*And* <sup>1</sup>the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit. Prov. 14. 29.
- 9 <sup>2</sup>Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry:  
 For anger resteth in the bosom of fools. <sup>3</sup>Prov. 14. 17.
- 10 Say not thou, What is *the cause* that the former days were better than these?  
 For thou dost not enquire <sup>1</sup>wisely concerning this. Jam. 1. 19.
- 11 Wisdom *is* <sup>2</sup>good with an inheritance:  
*And by it there is profit* <sup>3</sup>to them that see the sun. <sup>4</sup>ch. 11. 7.
- 12 For wisdom *is* a <sup>3</sup>defence, and money *is* a defence:  
 But the excellency of knowledge *is*, *that* wisdom giveth life to them that have it.
- 13 Consider the work of God:  
 For <sup>1</sup>who can make *that* straight, which he hath made crooked? <sup>2</sup>See Job 12. 14.
- 14 <sup>3</sup>In the day of prosperity be joyful,  
 But in the day of adversity consider:  
 God also hath <sup>4</sup>set the one over against the other,  
 To the end that man should find nothing after him. ch. 1. 15. Isai. 14. 27. <sup>5</sup>ch. 3. 4. Deut. 29. 47.
- 15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: <sup>1</sup>there is a <sup>2</sup>ch. 3. 14.  
 just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a

<sup>1</sup> Heb. out of wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Or, as good as an inheritance, yea, better too.<sup>3</sup> Heb. shadow.<sup>4</sup> Heb. made.

so doing. This verse is a warning against impatience in the exercise of power or the acquisition of riches.

8. *Better*] Inasmuch as something certain is attained, man contemplates the end throughout an entire course of action, and does not rest upon the beginning.

*patient...proud*] Lit. "Long," long-suffering... "high," in the sense of impatient.

11. *And by it there is profit &c.*] Lit. *And is profitable to the living*. The same word as in vi. 11, to the question in which it looks like an answer.

12. *wisdom is a defence &c.*] See marg. and Ps. cxxi. 5, i.e., He who is defended from adversity by his wisdom is in as good a position as he who is defended by his riches.

*excellency*] Lit. *Profit*.  
*giveth life to*] Lit. "Causes to live," "makes alive" (Prov. iii. 18); the deeper meaning of which is elicited by comparing these words with John vi. 63; Matt. iv. 4.

13. *the work of God*] The scheme of Divine Providence, the course of events which God orders and controls (cp. iii. 11). It comprises both events which are "straight," i.e. in accordance with our expectation, and events which are "crooked," i.e. which by their seeming inequality baffle our comprehension.

14. Good and prosperous days are in God's design peculiar times of comfort and rejoicing: the days of affliction and trouble, are in God's design the proper seasons of recollection and serious consideration. The Providence of God hath so contrived it, that our good and evil days should be intermingled each with the other. This mix-

ture of good and evil days is by the Divine Providence so proportioned, that it sufficiently justifies the dealings of God towards the sons of men, and obviates all their discontent and murmurings against Him.

*set the one over against the other*] Rather, *made this as well as that*, i.e. the day of adversity, as well as the day of prosperity. The seeming imitation of this passage in Ecclesiasticus (xxxvi. 13-15) affords a strong presumption that this Book was written before the days of the son of Sirach.

*to the end &c.*] God hath constituted the vicissitude of prosperity and adversity in such a way that no man can forecast the events that shall follow when he is removed from his present state. Cp. vi. 12 note.

15. *the days of my vanity*] This does not imply that those days of vanity were ended (see i. 12 note).

15-17. The meaning may be best explained by a paraphrase. Solomon states how the wise man should regard the "crooked" (v. 13) work of God when it bears upon him. He says in effect, "Do not think that thou couldst alter the two instances (described in v. 15) of such crooked work so as to make it straight, that thou art more righteous or more wise than He is Who ordained these events. To set up thy judgment in opposition to His would imply an excess of wickedness and folly, deserving the punishment of premature death. But rather it is good for thee to grasp these seeming anomalies; if thou ponder them they will tend to impress on thee that fear of God which is a part of wisdom, and will guide thee safely through all the perplexities

- <sup>m</sup> Prov. 25. 16 wicked *man* that *prolongeth his life* in his wickedness. <sup>n</sup> Be not righteous over much; <sup>o</sup> neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou <sup>1</sup>destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: <sup>o</sup> why shouldest thou die <sup>2</sup>before thy time? *It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand:* for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. <sup>p</sup> Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty *men* which are in the city. *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.* Also <sup>3</sup>take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.
- <sup>r</sup> Rom. 1. 23. 23 All this have I proved by wisdom: <sup>r</sup> I said, I will be wise; but it *was* far from me. <sup>s</sup> That which is far off, and <sup>t</sup> exceeding deep, who can find it out? <sup>u</sup> I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: <sup>v</sup> and I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, and her hands *as* bands: <sup>w</sup> whose pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith <sup>x</sup> the preacher, <sup>y</sup> counting one by one, to find out the account: which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: <sup>z</sup> one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.
- <sup>a</sup> Gen. 1. 27. 29 Lo, this only have I found, <sup>a</sup> that God hath made man upright; <sup>b</sup> Gen. 3. 6, 7. but <sup>b</sup> they have sought out many inventions.

CHAP. 8. WHO *is* as the wise *man*? and who knoweth the inter-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *be desolate?*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *not in thy time?*

<sup>3</sup> Heb. *give not thine heart.*

<sup>4</sup> Heb. *I and my heart compared.*

<sup>5</sup> Heb. *he that is good before God.*

<sup>6</sup> Or, weighing one thing after another, to find out the reason.

of this life" (cp. viii. 12, 13). The suggestion that these verses are intended to advocate a middle course between sin and virtue is at variance with the whole tenor of the Book.

16. *destroy thyself*] LXX. and Vulg. render, "be amazed." Cp. "marvel not" (v. 8).

20. The connexion of this verse with vv. 18, 19 becomes clearer if it is borne in mind that the fear of God, wisdom, and justice, are merely different sides of one and the same character, the formation of which is the aim of all the precepts in this chapter. The words "just" (vv. 15, 20) and "righteous" (v. 16) are exactly the same in Hebrew.

21, 22. *curse...cursed*] Rather, speak evil of...spoken evil of.

23. *I will be*] Or, I am. There was a time when Solomon thought himself wise enough to comprehend the work of God, and therefore needed for himself the self-humbling conviction declared in this verse.

*it i.e.*] Wisdom. Cp. viii. 17.)

24. Lit. Far off is that which hath been i.e. events as they have occurred in the order of Divine Providence), and deep, deep, who can find it out?

25. *reason*] The same word is translated "account" (v. 27), "invention" (v. 29), and "device" (ix. 10): it is derived from a root signifying "to count."

26. Cp. the account of Solomon's wives (1 K. xi. 1-8): see also Prov. ii. 16-19, v. 3 &c.

28. *one man*] One whose good qualities quite satisfy our expectation. Cp. the expression "one among a thousand" (marg. ref.).

*a woman*] The number of Solomon's wives and concubines (1 K. xi. 3) was a thousand.

29. *God hath made*] Rather, God made. A definite allusion to the original state of man: in which he was exempt from vanity.

VIII. Although in some degree baffled in his own pursuit of wisdom, Solomon yet regards wisdom as the nearest approach to "that good for man" which he is seeking; and presses here, as a part of that wisdom, a spirit of obedience (vv. 1-5). In the face of the incomprehensible course of external events, he determined to abide in the fear and trust of God (vv. 6-14), and to acknowledge the natural incompetence of every man to find out the unsearchable ways of God (vv. 15-17).

1. *and who*] Rather, and as he who knoweth. The possessor of wisdom excels

pretation of a thing? "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and <sup>1</sup>the boldness of his face shall be changed.

2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. "Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and "who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment <sup>2</sup>shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

6 Because <sup>3</sup>to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. <sup>4</sup>For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him <sup>5</sup>when it shall be? <sup>6</sup>There is no man that hath power <sup>7</sup>over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no <sup>8</sup>discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.

11 <sup>9</sup>Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that <sup>10</sup>it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. the strength.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. shall know.

<sup>3</sup> Or, how it shall be?

<sup>4</sup> Or, casting off weapons.

<sup>a</sup> Prov. 4. 8, 9.

See Acts

6. 15.

<sup>b</sup> Deut. 28.

50.

<sup>c</sup> Ezek. 17.

18.

<sup>d</sup> Rom. 13. 5.

<sup>e</sup> ch. 10. 4.

<sup>f</sup> Job 34. 18.

<sup>g</sup> ch. 3. 1.

<sup>h</sup> Prov. 24.

22.

<sup>i</sup> ch. 6. 12.

<sup>j</sup> & 10. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. 49. 6, 7.

<sup>l</sup> Job 14. 6.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. 10. 6.

& 50. 21.

Isai. 26. 10.

<sup>i</sup> Isai. 65. 20.

Rom. 2. 5.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. 37. 11.

18, 19.

Prov. 1. 32,

33.

Isai. 3. 10.

Matt. 25. 34,

41.

other men: it imparts serenity to his countenance, and removes the expression of gloom or fierceness (see marg. ref.).

2. oath] A reference to the oath of allegiance taken to Solomon at his accession to the throne (1 Chr. xxix. 24 marg.).

3. stand not &c.] i.e. "Do not persist in rebellion."

5. feel] Lit. know. The meaning is, "He who obeys the commandment (i.e. the word of the king, v. 4), will not be an accomplice in any act of rebellion; and if he be a wise man he discerns (lit. knows) that the king's commandment or action is liable to correction, if it be wrong, in God's time and by God's judgment." Cp. iii. 11, 17.

6. Because, therefore] Or, as in v. 7, "for."

The possibility of God's time and judgment being in opposition to a king's purpose or commandment (v. 5), suggests the thought that such discord is a misery (=evil, vi. 1) common to man (or, mankind).

7. when] Or, as in marg. For the meaning of this verse, cp. marg. ref.

8. neither hath he power] Rather, and there is no power. Cp. iii. 19.

no discharge &c.] i.e. "No exemption from

the final hour of struggle between life and death."

wickedness] Though the life of the wicked may be prolonged (vii. 15), yet wickedness itself has no inherent power to prolong that life.

9. to his own hurt] Or, "to the hurt of the subject." The case is still that of an unwise king whose command is obeyed (v. 2) even to the hurt of the wise man who obeys him.

10. i.e. "I saw wicked (rulers) buried, who came into the world and went from the Holy Place (the seat of authority and justice, Deut. xix. 17; 2 Chr. xix. 6), and they were forgotten in the city where they had so ruled to the hurt of their subjects: this—their death and oblivion—shews their lot also to be vanity." Others interpret the verse: "I have seen wicked men buried; and (others) came into the world, and from the Holy Place they went out of the world, and were forgotten in the city where they had done rightly" (cp. 2 K. vii. 9).

12. his days be prolonged] i.e. in his wickedness (v. 8).

I is emphatic, as if to mark the opposition to the "sons of men" (v. 11).

\* Ps. 73. 14.  
ch. 2. 14.  
& 7. 15.  
& 9. 1, 2.  
° ch. 2. 24.  
& 3. 12, 22.  
& 5. 18.  
& 9. 7.

14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men*, unto whom it "happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked *men*, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is

15 vanity. ° Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

16 When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that nei-*

° Job 5. 9.  
ch. 3. 11.  
Rom. 11. 33.

17 ther day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) then I beheld all the work of God, that "a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

\* Ps. 73. 16.

CHAP. 9. FOR all this<sup>1</sup> I considered in my heart even to declare all this, "that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is*

\* ch. 8. 14.

2 before them. ° All things come alike to all: *there is* one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; and he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. This *is* an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go*

° Job. 21. 7.  
&c.  
Ps. 73. 3,  
12, 13.  
Mal. 3. 15.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *I gave, or, set to my heart.*

14. *which is done upon the earth*] The instance of vanity, to which these words are applied, is the seeming inequality of God's justice; but if they are considered in connexion with the profession of personal faith in God's absolute justice (v. 12), the conclusion is irresistible, that, whatever reason the Preacher had for reserve in declaring his belief, he certainly looked forward to a final judgment in a future state of existence (cp. iii. 17, xii. 14).

15. *mirth*] Better, *Gladness*, or "joy" (as in ii. 10). The Hebrew word is applied not only to the pleasures arising from the bodily senses, but also frequently to religious joy. The sentiment of this verse is a frequent conclusion of the writer's personal experience (cp. marg. ref.), and is unfairly charged with Epicureanism. The Preacher is careful to set forth pleasure as a gift from God, to be earned by labour, and received with thankfulness to the Giver, and to be accounted for to Him. His estimate of the pleasures of the senses is recorded in vii. 2-6.

16, 17. These verses supplement v. 15 with the reflection that the man who goes beyond that limited sphere within which he can labour and be contented, and investigates the whole work of God, will find that his finite intelligence cannot grasp it.

16. *business*] Or, "travail" (i. 13, iii. 10).

The sleeplessness noted probably refers to the writer himself.

IX. In vv. 1-12 reasons are adduced for the universal conclusion (viii. 17) that no man can understand the works of God. This does not, however, prevent the assertion of the practical advantage in this life of that wisdom which includes the fear of God (v. 13 &c.). Cp. vv. 1-10 with Wisd. ii. 1-9.

1. A good man's trust in God is set forth as a counterpoise to our ignorance of the ways of Providence.

*in the hand of God*] Under His special protection (Deut. xxxiii. 3 &c.) as righteous, and under His direction (Prov. xxi. 1) as men.

*no man &c.*] Lit. both love and also hatred man knoweth not: *all are* before them. Love and hatred here mean the ordinary outward tokens of God's favour or displeasure, i.e. prosperity and adversity. "Man knoweth not" probably means: "man knows not whether to expect prosperity or adversity from God; all his earthly future is in obscurity."

2. *event*] See ii. 14 note.  
*sweareth*] i.e. Swears lightly or profanely.

3. Cp. viii. 11. Theseeming indiscriminate-ness of the course of events tends to encourage evil-disposed men in their folly.

- 4 to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there  
 5 is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the  
 living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any  
 thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory  
 6 of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their  
 envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for  
 ever in any thing that is done under the sun. c Job 14. 21.  
Isai. 63. 10.  
d Job 7. 8,  
9, 10.  
Isai. 26. 14.
- 7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with  
 8 a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy gar-  
 ments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. e ch. 8. 15.
- 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the  
 life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the  
 days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy  
 10 labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand  
 findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor  
 device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou  
 goest. f ch. 2. 10,  
24. & 3. 13,  
22. & 5. 18.
- 11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to  
 the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the  
 wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to  
 12 men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For  
 a man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in  
 an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare;  
 so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth  
 suddenly upon them. g Amos 2.  
1-4, 15.  
Jer. 9. 23.
- 13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great h ch. 8. 7.  
i Prov. 20. 6.  
Luke 12.  
20, 30.  
1 Thess. 5. 3.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. See, or, Enjoy life.

4. For to him] Rather, Yet to him. Notwithstanding evils, life has its advantage, and specially when compared with death.

dog] To the Hebrews a type of all that was contemptible (1 Sam. xvii. 43).

5, 6. See viii. 12, 14 note. The living are conscious that there is a future before them: but the dead are unconscious; they earn nothing, receive nothing, even the memory of them soon disappears; they are no longer excited by the passions which belong to men in this life; their share in its activity has ceased. Solomon here describes what he sees, not what he believes; there is no reference here to the fact or the mode of the existence of the soul in another world, which are matters of faith.

The last clause of r. 6 indicates that the writer confines his observations on the dead to their portion in, or relation to, this world.

6. now] Rather, long ago.

7-12. Read these six verses connectedly, in order to arrive at the meaning of the writer; and cp. ii. 1-12.

After the description (rv. 5, 6) of the portionless condition of the dead, the next thought which occurs is that the man who is prosperous and active should simply enjoy his portion all through this life (rv. 7-10); and then (rv. 11, 12) follows the correct-

ing thought (see iii. 1-15 note), introduced as usual (ii. 12, iv. 1, 7) by "I returned," viz. that the course of events is disposed and regulated by another Will than that of man.

The person addressed is one whose life of labour is already pleasing to God, and who bears visible tokens of God's favour.

7. now accepteth] Rather, already has pleasure in. Joy (marg. ref. note) is regarded as a sign of the approbation and favour of God.

8. White garments and perfume are simply an expressive sign of joy.

10. The works which we carry on here with the combined energies of body and soul come to an end in the hour of death, when the soul enters a new sphere of existence, and body and soul cease to act together. Cp. John ix. 4.

device] See vii. 25 note.

11. chance] Or, "incident," that which comes to us from without, one of the external events described in ch. iii. Cp. ii. 14 note.

12. time] See iii. 1 &c.

13. Or, Also this have I seen—wisdom under the sun, and great it seemed to me.

From this verse to the end of ch. x., the writer inculcates, in a series of proverbs, wisdom in contrast to folly, as the best remedy in the present life to the evil of vanity.

<sup>k</sup> See  
2 Sam. 20.  
16-22.

<sup>l</sup> Prov. 21.  
22. & 24, 5.  
ch. 7. 10.  
ver. 18.  
<sup>m</sup> Mark 6.  
2, 3.

<sup>n</sup> ver. 16.  
<sup>o</sup> Josh. 7. 1,  
11, 12.

<sup>a</sup> Prov. 13.  
16. & 18. 2.  
<sup>b</sup> ch. 8. 3.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Sam. 25.  
24, &c.  
Prov. 25. 16.

<sup>d</sup> Esth. 3. 1.

- 14 unto me: <sup>k</sup>*There was* a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built  
15 great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no  
16 man remembered that same poor man. <sup>l</sup>*Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless* <sup>m</sup>*the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.*  
17 *The words of wise men are heard in quiet*  
*More than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.*  
18 *Wisdom is better than weapons of war:*  
*But* <sup>o</sup>*one sinner destroyeth much good.*

CHAP. 10. DEAD <sup>1</sup>*flies* cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour:

*So doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

- 2 A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand;  
But a fool's heart at his left.

- 3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, <sup>2</sup>*his wisdom* faileth *him*,

<sup>a</sup>*And he saith to every one that he is a fool.*

- 4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, <sup>b</sup>*leave not thy* place;

For <sup>c</sup>*yielding* pacifieth great offences.

- 5 There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun,  
As an error *which* proceedeth <sup>3</sup>*from the ruler:*

- 6 <sup>d</sup>*Folly is set* <sup>4</sup>*in great dignity,—and the rich sit in low place.*

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *Flies of death.*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *his heart.*

<sup>4</sup> Heb. *in great heights.*

<sup>3</sup> Heb. *from before.*

14, 15. A parable probably without foundation in fact. Critics who ascribe this Book to a late age offer no better suggestion than that the "little city" may be Athens delivered B.C. 480 from the host of Xerxes through the wisdom of Themistocles, or Dora besieged B.C. 218 by Antiochus the Great.

Verses 16, 17 are comments on the two facts—the deliverance of the city and its forgetfulness of him who delivered it—stated in v. 15.

18. *sinner*] The word in the original indicates intellectual as well as moral error.

X. This chapter resembles a portion of the Book of Proverbs, consisting entirely of rhythmical sentences giving advice, more or less direct, as to conduct. It is part of the writer's answer to the question (ii. 3, vi. 12) "What is good for men to do?" The thought which underlies the whole chapter is the advantage of that wisdom which includes piety and patience, as practical guidance through all the perplexities of life: various traits of wisdom are set forth in a favourable light, heightened by contrast with folly. A great part of the advice seems, in addition to its general application, to have a special reference to servants of a king.

1. This verse is by its meaning so closely

connected with ix. 18 that the selection of it for the beginning of a new chapter seems unfortunate.

*apothecary*] Rather, dealer in spices and perfumes (cp. Ex. xxx. 25). The swarms of flies in the East very soon corrupt and destroy any moist unguent or mixture left uncovered, and pollute a dish of food in a few minutes.

*so doth &c.*] Lit. more weighty than wisdom, than honour, is a little folly.

2. The metaphor perhaps means "A wise man's sense is in its place, ready to help and protect him; but a fool's is missing when it is wanted, and so is useless."

3. "Way" may be understood either literally (cp. v. 15), or figuratively, of the course of action which he follows.

*he saith &c.*] He exposes his folly to every one he meets.

4. *If the spirit &c.*] i.e. If he be angry. *leave not thy place*] i.e. Do not lose thy self-control and quit his presence. Gentleness on thy part will calm both thyself and him, and prevent great wrongs being committed by either.

6, 7. The "evil" of v. 5 is here specified as that caprice of a king by which an unworthy favourite of low origin is promoted to successive dignities, while a noble person is degraded or neglected.

- 7 I have seen servants <sup>c</sup>upon horses,  
And princes walking as servants upon the earth. <sup>c</sup> Prov. 10.  
10. & 30. 22.
- 8 <sup>f</sup>He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it;  
And whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. <sup>f</sup> Ps. 7. 15.  
Prov. 26. 27.
- 9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith;  
And he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.
- 10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge,  
Then must he put to more strength:  
But wisdom is profitable to direct.
- 11 Surely the serpent will bite <sup>g</sup>without enchantment;  
And <sup>h</sup>a babbler is no better. <sup>g</sup> Ps. 59. 4, 5.  
Jer. 8. 17.
- 12 <sup>a</sup>The words of a wise man's mouth are <sup>2</sup>gracious;  
But <sup>i</sup>the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. <sup>a</sup> Prov. 10.  
32.  
& 12. 13.
- 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness:  
And the end of <sup>j</sup>his talk is mischievous madness. <sup>j</sup> Prov. 10.  
14.  
& 18. 7.
- 14 <sup>k</sup>A fool also <sup>l</sup>is full of words:  
A man cannot tell what shall be;  
And <sup>m</sup>what shall be after him, who can tell him? <sup>k</sup> Prov. 15. 2.  
  
<sup>l</sup> ch. 3. 23.  
& 6. 12.  
& 8. 7.
- 15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them,  
Because he knoweth not how to go to the city.
- 16 <sup>n</sup>Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,  
And thy princes eat in the morning! <sup>n</sup> Isai. 3. 4,  
5, 12.
- 17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles,  
And <sup>o</sup>thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for  
drunkenness! <sup>o</sup> Prov. 31. 4.
- 18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth;  
And through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.
- 19 A feast is made for laughter, and <sup>p</sup>wine <sup>q</sup>maketh merry:  
But money answereth all things. <sup>p</sup> Ps. 104. 15.
- 20 <sup>r</sup>Curse not the king, no not in thy <sup>s</sup>thought;  
<sup>r</sup> Ex. 22. 28  
Acts 23. 5.
- <sup>1</sup> Heb. the master of the tongue.  
<sup>2</sup> Heb. grace.  
<sup>3</sup> Heb. his mouth.  
<sup>4</sup> Heb. multiplieth words.  
<sup>5</sup> Heb. maketh glad the life.  
<sup>6</sup> Or, conscience, figure like, Luke 10. 40.

8-10. The figures seem to be taken from the work of building up and pulling down houses. In their general application, they recommend the man who would act wisely to be cautious when taking any step in life which involves risk.

8. *breaketh an hedge*] Rather, breaks through a wall.

*serpent*] The habit of snakes is to nestle in a chink of a wall, or among stones (cp. Amos v. 19).

9. *be endangered*] Rather, cut himself.

11. Rather, If a serpent without enchantment (i.e. not being enchanted) bites, then there is no advantage to the charmer: i.e. if the charmer is unwisely slack in exercising his craft, he will be bitten like other people. See Ps. lviii. 4 note.

14. *full of words*] Confident talking of the future is indicated rather than mere loquacity. Cp. Jas. iv. 13.

15. The sense is, "The fool wearies himself with ineffectual attempts, he has

not sufficient knowledge for the transaction of ordinary business."

16-20. Foolish rulers, by their weakness, self-indulgence and sloth, bring decay upon the state: nobleness and temperance insure prosperity: yet the subject must not rebel in word or thought against his king.

16. *a child*] Rather, young. The word is applied to Rehoboam (2 Chr. xiii. 7) at the time of his accession to the throne, when he was 41 years old.

*eat in the morning*] A sign of intemperance (cp. Isai. v. 11).

17. *son of nobles*] i.e. of a noble disposition.

18. The "building" or "house" represents the state. Cp. Isai. iii. 6; Amos ix. 10. *droppeth through*] i.e. Lets the rain through the roof.

19. Lit. For merriment they make a feast (= bread), and wine gladdens the living, and money supplies all things.

20. *Curse*] Cp. vii. 21, 22.

And curse not the rich in thy bedchamber :  
For a bird of the air shall carry the voice,  
And that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

<sup>a</sup> See Isai.  
32. 20.  
<sup>b</sup> Deut. 15.  
10.  
Prov. 19. 17.  
Matt. 10. 42.  
2 Cor. 9. 8.  
Gal. 6. 9.  
Heb. 6. 10.  
<sup>c</sup> Ps. 112. 9.  
Luke 6. 30.  
1 Tim. 6.  
18, 19.  
<sup>d</sup> Mic. 5. 5.  
<sup>e</sup> Eph. 5. 16.  
<sup>f</sup> John 3. 8.  
<sup>g</sup> Ps. 139.  
14, 15.

**CHAP. 11.** CAST thy bread <sup>a</sup> upon the waters :

<sup>b</sup> For thou shalt find it after many days.

2 Give a portion <sup>d</sup> to seven, and also to eight ;

<sup>c</sup> For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth :

And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north,

In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow ;

And he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

5 As <sup>f</sup> thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit,

<sup>g</sup> Nor how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child :

Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

6 In the morning sow thy seed,

And in the evening withhold not thine hand :

For thou knowest not whether <sup>h</sup> shall prosper, either this or that,

Or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

7 Truly the light *is* sweet,

And a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes <sup>a</sup> to behold the sun :

8 But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all ;

<sup>a</sup> ch. 7. 11.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *upon the face of the waters.*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *shall be right.*

XI. There ought to be no division between x. 20 and xi. 1.

1, 2. As if in contrast to the self-indulgence described in x. 16-19, the opposite virtue, readiness to give to others, is inculcated. The use of the word "bread" in both x. 19 (see note) and xi. 1 points the contrast.

1. The verse means, "Shew hospitality, even though the corresponding return of hospitality to you seem improbable; yet be hospitable in faith." Cp. Luke xiv. 13, 14; Heb. xiii. 2. Some interpreters not unreasonably understand by "bread" the seed from the produce of which bread is made. Seed cast upon the fertile soil flooded by the early rains would be returned to the sower in autumn with large increase.

2. The verse means, "Let your hospitality and your alms be extensive: for you know not what reverses may befall either that person who by your liberality will be strengthened to meet them, or yourself who may come to need grateful friends." Cp. Luke xvi. 9.

*seven, and also to eight*] A definite number for an indefinite (cp. marg. ref.).

3-6. "Unforeseen events come from God; and the man who is always gazing on the uncertain future will neither begin nor complete any useful work: but do thou bear in mind that times and circumstances, the powers of nature and the results to which

they minister, are in the hand of God; and be both diligent and trustful." The images are connected chiefly with the occupation of an agricultural labourer: the discharge of rain from the cloud, and the inclination of the falling tree, and the direction of the wind, are beyond his control, though the result of his work is affected by them. The common application of the image of the fallen tree to the state of departed souls was probably not in the mind of the inspired writer.

5. *spirit*] The same Hebrew word (like *Pneuma* in Greek and *Ghost* in English) signifies both the wind (v. 4) and the Spirit (cp. marg. ref.). The Old Testament in many places recognizes the special operation of God (Job x. 8-12; Ps. cxxxix. 13-16; Jer. i. 5), and distinctly of the Spirit of God (Job xxxi. 15) in the origination of every child. Cp. Gen. ii. 7.

7-xii. 7. The preceding exhortation to a life of labour in the sight of God is now addressed specially to the active and the young; and is enforced by another consideration, namely, the transitory character of all that sustains youth.

7. *the light...the sun*] Gifts of God which cheer man's toil, but which he almost ceases to appreciate in his old age.

8. *days of darkness*] The time of old age, and perhaps any time of sorrow or misfortune. Cp. xii. 2.



Yet let him remember the days of darkness;  
For they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

- 9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth;  
And let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,  
And walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:

<sup>1</sup> Num. 16. 30.

But know thou, that for all these things <sup>k</sup>God will bring thee into judgment.

<sup>k</sup> ch. 12. 14. Rom. 2. 6. —11.

- 10 Therefore remove <sup>l</sup>sorrow from thy heart,  
And <sup>m</sup>put away evil from thy flesh:  
<sup>n</sup>For childhood and youth are vanity.

<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. 7. 1. 2 Tim. 2. 22. <sup>m</sup> Ps. 39. 5.

CHAP. 12. REMEMBER <sup>a</sup>now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,

<sup>a</sup> Prov. 22. 6. Lam. 3. 27.

While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh,  
<sup>b</sup>When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

<sup>b</sup> See 2 Sam. 19. 35.

- 2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened,

Nor the clouds return after the rain:

- 3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,  
And the strong men shall bow themselves,  
And <sup>2</sup>the grinders cease because they are few,  
And those that look out of the windows be darkened,

- 4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets,

When the sound of the grinding is low,

And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird,

And all <sup>c</sup>the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

<sup>c</sup> 2 Sam. 19. 35.

<sup>1</sup> Or, anger.

<sup>2</sup> Or, the grinders fail, because they grind little.

*All that cometh*] i.e. "The future," which must not be reckoned on by the active man, as if his present state of healthy energy were to continue.

9. *Rejoice...cheer...walk*] The imperative mood is used to encourage one who possesses certain gifts from God to remember that they come from God and are to be used in accordance with His will.

*in the ways &c.*] The words are probably used in an innocent sense (ii. 10; Prov. xvi. 9).

*judgment*] This includes a judgment beyond the grave; though the writer's view of it was dim and indefinite if compared with a Christian's.

10. The sense appears to be, "Let the timely recollection of God's judgment, and of the fleeting character of youth, so influence your conduct that you will refrain from acts which entail future remorse and pain."

XII. 1. *Remember now*] Rather, *And remember*. The connexion between this verse and the preceding one is unfortunately interrupted by our division of chapters.

*Creator*] Gratitude to God as Creator is here inculcated, as just previously (xi. 9) fear of God as Judge. Godliness, acquired as a habit in youth, is recommended as the proper compensation for that natural cessation of youthful happiness which makes the days

of old age more or less evil; more evil in proportion as there is less of godliness in the heart, and less evil where there is more godliness.

*while the evil days come not*] Rather, *before the evil days come*.

2. *While...not*] Or, *Before*. The darkening of the lights of heaven denotes a time of affliction and sadness. Cp. Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8; Job iii. 9; Isai. v. 30. Contrast this representation of old age with 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, 5.

3-6. The body in old age and death is here described under the figure of a decaying house with its inmates and furniture.

3. This verse is best understood as referring to the change which old age brings to four parts of the body, the arms ("the keepers"), the legs ("the strong men"), the teeth ("the grinders"), and the eyes.

4. *And the doors...is low*] The house is viewed from without. The way of entry and exit is stopped: little or no sound issues forth to tell of life stirring within. The old man as he grows older has less in common with the rising generation; mutual interest and intercourse decline. Some take the doors and the sound of the mill as figures of the lips and ears and of the speech.

*he shall rise &c.*] Here the metaphor of the house passes out of sight. The verb may

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,  
And fears shall be in the way,  
And the almond tree shall flourish,  
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,  
And desire shall fail:

<sup>d</sup> Job 17. 13.  
<sup>e</sup> Jer. 9. 17.

Because man goeth to <sup>e</sup>his long home, and <sup>e</sup>the mourners go about the streets:

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken,  
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

<sup>f</sup> Gen. 3. 10.  
Job 34. 15.  
Ps. 90. 3.  
<sup>g</sup> ch. 3. 21.  
<sup>h</sup> Num. 16. 22.  
Job 31. 14.  
Isai. 57. 16.  
Zech. 12. 1.  
<sup>i</sup> Ps. 62. 9.  
<sup>j</sup> ch. 1. 2.  
<sup>k</sup> 1 Kin. 4. 32.

7 <sup>f</sup>Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:

<sup>g</sup>And the spirit shall return unto God <sup>h</sup>who gave it.

8 <sup>i</sup>Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

9 And <sup>j</sup>moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out,

10 and <sup>k</sup>set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out <sup>l</sup>acceptable words: and that which was written was upright,

<sup>1</sup> Or, the more wise the preacher was, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. words of delight.

either be taken impersonally (= "they shall rise," compare the next verse); or as definitely referring to an old man, who as the master of the house rises out of sleep at the first sound in the morning.

*all the daughters of musick*] i.e. Singing women (ii. 8).

*be brought low*] i.e. Sound faintly in the ears of old age.

5. *high*] The powerful and the proud, such persons as an old man in his timidity might shrink from opposing or meeting; or, high ground which old men would avoid ascending.

*frays...in the way*] Cp. Prov. xxvi. 13.

*the almond tree*] The type of old age. Many modern critics translate "The almond shall be despised," i.e. pleasant food shall be no longer relished.

*the grasshopper*] Rather, the locust. The clause means, heaviness and stiffness shall take the place of that active motion for which the locust is conspicuous.

*desire*] Lit. the caper-berry; which, eaten as a provocative to appetite, shall fail to take effect on a man whose powers are exhausted.

*long home*] Lit. "eternal (see i. 4 note) house;" man's place in the next world. Without attributing to the author of Ecclesiastes that deep insight into the future life which is shewn by the writer of the Epistles to the Corinthians, we may observe that He by Whom both writers were inspired sanctions in both Books (see 2 Cor. v. 1-6) the use of the same expression "eternal house." In 2 Cor. it means that spiritual body which shall be hereafter; and it is placed, as it is here (see v. 3), in contrast with that earthly dissolving house which clothes the spirit of man in this world.

*mourners*] The singing women who attend funerals for hire (see Matt. ix. 23).

6. *be loosed*] The termination of life is signified generally by the snapping of the silver cord by which the lamp hangs from the ceiling; by the dashing in pieces of the cup or reservoir of oil; by the shattering of the pitcher used to bring water from the spring; and by the breaking of the wheel by which a bucket is let down into the well. Others discern in the silver cord, the soul which holds the body in life; in the bowl, the body; and in the golden oil (cp. Zech. iv. 12) within it, the spirit.

*the spirit*] i.e. The spirit separated unto God from the body at death. No more is said here of its future destiny. To return to God, Who is the fountain (Ps. xxxvi. 9) of Life, certainly means to continue to live. The doctrine of life after death is implied here as in Exod. iii. 6 (cp. Mark xii. 26), Ps. xvii. 15 (see note), and in many other passages of Scripture earlier than the age of Solomon. The inference that the soul loses its personality and is absorbed into something else has no warrant in this or any other statement in this Book, and would be inconsistent with the announcement of a judgment after death (x. 14).

8-14. This passage is properly regarded as the Epilogue of the whole Book; a kind of apology for the obscurity of many of its sayings. The passage serves therefore to make the Book more intelligible and more acceptable.

Here, as in the beginning of the Book (i. 1, 2), the Preacher speaks of himself (rv. 8, 9, 10) in the third person. He first repeats (x. 8) the mournful, perplexing theme with which his musings began (i. 2); and then states the encouraging practical conclusion (rv. 13, 14) to which they have led him. It

- 11 *even* words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and <sup>1</sup>much study is a weariness of the flesh.
- 13 <sup>2</sup>Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: <sup>3</sup>Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.
- 14 For <sup>4</sup>God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.
- <sup>1</sup> Or, *reading*.  
<sup>2</sup> Or, *The end of the matter*,  
 even all that hath been heard, is.  
<sup>3</sup> Dent. 6. 2. & 10. 12.  
<sup>4</sup> ch. 1. 18.  
<sup>5</sup> ch. 11. 9.  
 Matt. 12. 36.  
 Acts 17. 30, 31.  
 Rom. 2. 16.  
 1 Cor. 4. 5.

has been pointed out that the Epilogue assumes the identity of the Preacher with the writer of the Book of Proverbs.

11. Lit. Words of wise men are as goads, and as nails driven in (by) masters of assemblies; they are given from one shepherd: "goads," because they rouse the hearer and impel him to right actions; "nails" (perhaps tent-spikes), because they remain fixed in the memory: "masters of assemblies" are simply "teachers" or "preachers" (see i. 1 note), instructors of such assemblies as Wisdom addresses (Prov. i. 20).

*one shepherd*] i.e. God, Who is the supreme Giver of wisdom (Prov. ii. 6), and the chief Shepherd (Jer. xxiii. 1-4). Cp. 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

12. *by these*] i.e. "By the words of wise men."

*books*] Rather, "Writings." Probably the proverbs current in the Preacher's age, including, though not specially indicating, his own.

The Preacher protests against the folly of protracted, unprofitable, meditation.

13. Lit. "The conclusion of the discourse" (or "word," = words, i. 1), "the whole, let us hear."

*the whole duty of man*] Rather, the whole man. To fear God and to obey Him is the whole man, constitutes man's whole being; that only is conceded to Man; all other things, as this Book again and again teaches, are dependent on a Higher Incomprehensible Being.

14. *judgment with*] Rather, judgment (which shall be held) upon &c.: i.e., an appointed judgment which shall take place in another world, as distinct from that retribution which frequently follows man's actions in the course of this world, and which is too imperfect (cp. ii. 15, iv. 1, vii. 15, ix. 2 &c.) to be described by these expressions. He that is fully convinced that there is no solid happiness to be found in this world, and that there is a world to come wherein God will adjudge men to happiness or misery respectively, as they have made their choice and acted here, must necessarily subscribe to the truth of Solomon's conclusion, that true religion is the only way to true happiness.